

**Historical Studies 101**  
**Spring 2012**

**Skills Assignment #4: Analysis of a Primary Source for your Prospectus**

**Goals:** In addition to developing your writing skills, which is central to every assignment in this course, Skills Assignment #4 has three major goals:

1. to develop the skills of identifying, reading, and analyzing primary sources,
2. to provide a “close reading” of your primary texts,
3. and to prepare the primary source portion of your prospectus (final project)

**Assignment:** In a polished 500-600 word paper (2 full pages), analyze the primary source(s) for your project. Using supporting evidence from your other secondary source material, your paper should develop a thesis about the past that directly ties your primary source into the central research questions of your prospectus.

- ▲ Before you begin writing, carefully read (and re-read) your source(s), extracting as much information as you can.
  - Think about the source’s production: **Who produced it, when, and why.**
  - Pay attention also to what the source is *not* telling you: its **unstated assumptions**, the **partiality of its perspective.**
  - Think about the source's potential **audience.** Who was the intended recipient?
  - Think about the **significance of the source** more broadly: What can it tell us about its author/creator? What can it tell us about the context in which it was produced?
  - You will also need to include a brief description/overview of the document in your analysis.
- ▲ Having interrogated your source(s), develop a thesis about the document that tells you something broader about your research questions. It is more important that this thesis be specific and sustainable, rather than large and ambitious. Remember, you have a VERY limited source base; avoid making sweeping, reaching claims. Contextualize the document in your analysis. A well-crafted thesis will lead smoothly into an essay discussing these sources and what we can learn from them.
- ▲ Remember this is a writing-based assignment, **so pay special attention to the shape and structure of your argument and supporting points.** Consult your Strunk & White for further support.
- ▲ Be sure to include support from the sources for your arguments.
- ▲ **As always, be sure to use the correct citation formatting.** This applies not only to references from your primary source but also to any secondary sources you find it appropriate to include.
- ▲ Double-spaced, 12 pt, Times New Roman, 1” Margins
- ▲ Again you are strongly encouraged to read the relevant pages in Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing History* (2010), on primary source analysis – especially pp. 10-14, 31-32.